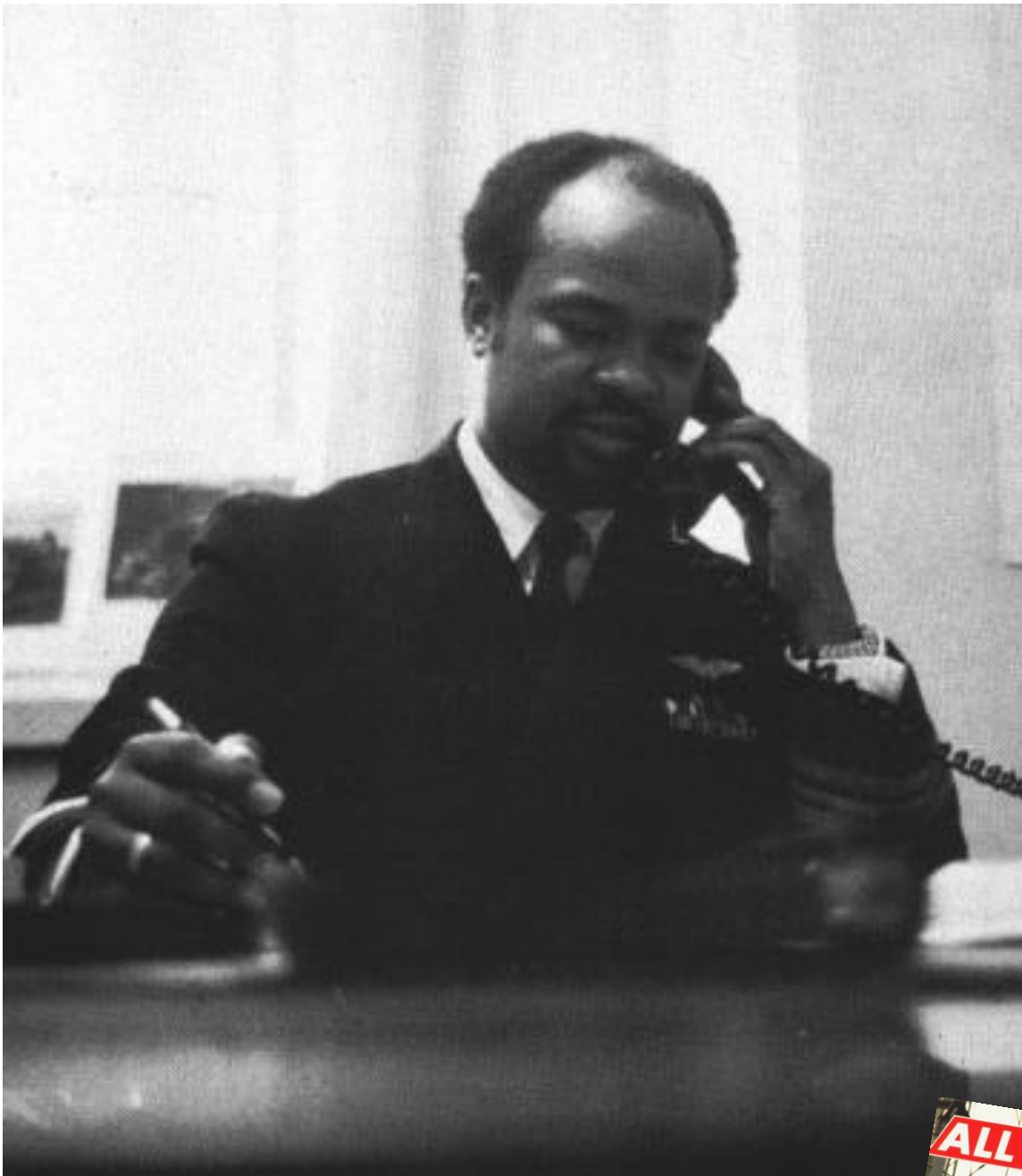


Document B: William “Bill” Norman

Background: Bill Norman was born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1938. Growing up during the era of segregation, Norman was one of the first generations to benefit from changing racial policies in the United States and yet still experience blatant discrimination. Norman attended Virginia Wesleyan College for his first degree and later attended American University for his Master’s Degree.

Naval Service: Rather than take the chance of being drafted into the Army, Norman decided to join the Navy in 1960. During his first ten years of service, Norman had worked as an airborne controller, instructor at the Naval Academy, and served as a social aide at the White House. During his naval career, Norman encountered racial discrimination from time to time. He recalled once being asked by the commander of a Naval Air Station in the Deep South NOT to attend an evening function at the officers’ club because his presence might be offensive to locals. In 1970, exhausted by having served on multiple councils or commissions on race relations but seeing little improvement, Norman wrote a formal resignation. At this time, fewer than 6% of enlisted personnel and 1% of naval officers were African American.

In his resignation Norman stated, “the unceasing strain of the conflict between being black and being Navy was greater than [I] was willing to bear any longer.” The same year Norman wrote his resignation, Elmo Zumwalt had been selected as the new Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). The CNO is the highest ranking officer assigned to work in the Navy. Zumwalt was progressive compared to previous Navy leadership and saw potential in Norman’s experiences and expertise. Zumwalt reached out to Norman to get a better understanding of the difficulties facing black sailors. Ultimately Norman decided to stay in the Navy and work with Zumwalt to make substantial improvements for minority service members. Norman was appointed as the Executive Director of the CNO Advisory Committee on Race Relations and Minority Affairs in 1971 and oversaw the publication “Navy Race Relations and Minority Affairs Programs.” The document reasserted the need for equal opportunity in the Navy and also established affirmative action protocols.



Bill Norman as featured in the April 1971 *All Hands*.

